

Israel in recent years also relate to hybrid individuals, based on their appearing to show 'mixed' characters. The zone of overlap between the two *Pernis* species in Russia is seemingly at most rather small, and has been vigorously disputed by some authoritative authors (Stresemann 1940, Stepanyan 1983, Gamauf & Haring 2004), but nonetheless other Soviet authors were already reporting hybrids many years ago (see citations in Stepanyan 1983). Others admit the presence of a zone of overlap, but contest that they do not interbreed (e.g. Kislenco 1974). It is clear that the issue of whether these two species of honey buzzards are hybridising is one that is far from resolved, and indeed given that *P. ptilorhynchus* has been postulated to be spreading west in recent years (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001) might either be considered increasingly likely or its incidence be increasing. Detailed field studies from relevant regions are clearly rather urgently required. The

editors wish to thank all those who expressed an opinion on this bird. Because of the wide circulation to which this note and the accompanying photographs were subjected, we will only consider publishing very detailed, and preferably illustrated, responses on the identity of the Gabon bird.

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First record of Dunlin *Calidris alpina* for Benin

Ben van Muyen

Première mention du Bécasseau variable *Calidris alpina* pour le Bénin. Deux à cinq Bécasseaux variables *Calidris alpina* en plumage adulte internuptial ont été observées dans les marais de Guézin, au Lac Ahémé, à environ 30 km de Grand Popo, près de la frontière du Togo, dans le sud Bénin (06°24'N 01°57'E). Ceci constitue la première donnée documentée pour le pays.

On the afternoon of 6 February 2003, Barend van Gemerden and I visited Guézin marshes, Lac Ahémé, c.30 km from Grand Popo, near the Togolese border in south Benin (06°24'N 01°57'E). The area comprises an estuary with tidal mudflats, coastal lagoons, marshes and saltpans. During our visit we observed the first Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* for the country (van Muyen 2005). We also saw several species of wader and subsequently realised that one of these had not been recorded previously in the country either.

Two rather dumpy shorebirds were foraging on exposed mud, picking and probing methodically. We instantly identified them as Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, a very common species on tidal mudflats of the Dutch Wadden Sea, where we watch waders regularly at all seasons. We observed them for c.10 minutes through 8 × 42 and 10 × 42 binoculars,

and a 20 × 65 telescope. A little later we found four more individuals on another patch of mud. All were in non-breeding plumage, being rather featureless with a plain, dull brownish-grey head and upperparts, a short, indistinct white supercilium, and white underparts with fine breast streaking forming a rather well-defined band. The longish, slightly decurved bill and the legs were black. Curlew Sandpiper *C. ferruginea*, the principal confusion species, has a longer, more decurved bill, longer legs, imparting a less dumpy appearance, and a more prominent supercilium.

This appears to be the first documented record of this Palearctic visitor for Benin. Although a table in Dodman & Taylor (1996), presenting the totals of waterbird counts undertaken in West Africa in January 1996, mentions 26 Dunlin for Benin, this exceptionally high figure has never

been documented and the record must be considered doubtful (the same table also mentions 120 Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* for Benin, an incredible total which casts serious doubt on the reliability of other figures for the country). Dunlin has been recorded in Ghana and neighbouring Togo and Nigeria, where it is considered rare or a vagrant (Grimes 1987, Elgood *et al.* 1994, Cheke & Walsh 1996). It is not included in Dowsett's (1993) list for Benin, nor is it marked on the distribution maps in Borrow & Demey (2001, 2004), and no records have been reported since (P. Claffey *in litt.* 2005). In West Africa, the species occurs mainly on the coast from Mauritania to Guinea, with small numbers or singles occasionally found inland, mostly in the central Niger delta in Mali (Borrow & Demey 2001).

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